



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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WILDLIFE REFUGE CREATED IN ALASKA TO PROTECT SEA OTTER

Creation of the Simeonof National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska for the preservation and propagation of the sea otter was announced today by Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton.

The new refuge contains approximately 10,442 acres. It includes all of Simeonof Island and the island's tidelands together with all adjacent water areas extending one mile beyond mean low water. Simeonof, one of the Shumagin group off the southeasterly coast of the Alaska Peninsula, is approximately 250 miles southeast of Kodiak Island.

Assistant Secretary of the Interior Ross Leffler said Simeonof Island's luxuriant kelp growth provides an ideal habitat for the otters. The population of the herd is estimated at approximately 500. Otter herds live on other islands.

The species is slowly increasing because it has received vigilant protection since the Alaska Game Commission discovered a few otters surviving in an Aleutian Bay, Assistant Secretary Leffler said.

Man is the otter's only serious enemy. From time immemorial Eskimos and Aleuts had hunted otters, but in moderation and with little harm to the vast herds. but in 1741 a shipwrecked crew of sailors returned to Russia with 700 sea otter furs and a ruthless hunt began for the silky, valuable fur. Aleuts were hired to clear the prey. Scores of otter ships put out from ports as distant as Boston and Mexico. So tremendous was the slaughter that by 1840 sea otters were at the brink of extinction.

Simeonof Island is well adapted to livestock production. The order creating the wildlife refuge permits grazing to continue, but only one grazing permit will be permitted at any one time. Violation of game regulations or undue interference with the otter herd by the grazing lessee, his agents or employees, will constitute valid reason for cancellation of the lease.

Establishment of the refuge will also give increased protection to other wildlife in the area, including tufted and horned puffins, glaucous-winged gulls, murres, cormorants, fulmars, kittiwakes, insectivorous birds, eider and harlequin ducks, Arctic terns and sea lions.

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